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CBC Newsletter

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For members of the Carolina Bird Club, Inc., Ornithological Society of the Carolinas

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Join the CBC's 75th Anniversary Celebration! Raleigh, NC Spring Meeting

Lena Gallitano & Gail Lankford

Seventy-five years and counting. Even our most senior members don't recall the early discussions of Charlotte Hilton Green, H.H. and C.S. Brimley, Dr. Carey Bostian, Harry T. Davis, Dr. John N. Grey, Jr. and one unknown participant when deciding to form the Raleigh Bird Club and at the same time pursue the idea to reach beyond Raleigh for a statewide club.

Seventy-five interested people from towns across the state attended an organizational meeting in Raleigh on March 6, 1937, and the North Carolina Bird Club was born. Eleven years later, Alexander Sprunt Jr. from Charleston responded favorably to an official inquiry from the N. C. Bird Club about a coalition with South Carolina groups, and in 1948 the two state organization became the Carolina Bird Club we know today.

While our history does not reach back to the earliest days of birding organizations such as Audubon, it is still a memorable time to pause and reflect. Birding in 1937 certainly did not have all the modern conveniences that make it what it is today … a few field guides rather than dozens; heavy, large binoculars that were likely more appropriate for wartime use than birding; "party" telephone lines where several families shared one line rather than a cell phone or iPhone for instant sighting updates from a favorite refuge or birding hot spot.

We've come a long way, CBC, and in May we plan to take a look back, bird in the footsteps of our founding members and reflect on all the changes. We hope you'll join us the weekend of May 4-6, 2012 in Raleigh to do just that. We'll have the usual field trip schedule on Friday and Saturday to bird some of the local hot spots you often see mentioned on Carolinabirds.

Friday night's buffet dinner at our headquarters hotel, Sheraton Four Points Raleigh-Durham Airport, will precede an evening of reminiscences, reflections, and stories from past CBC presidents and other long-time members. Our emcee, Clyde Smith, CBC newsletter editor for 22 years, will no doubt have some thoughts to add as well! And who knows, maybe you'll even learn how *The Chat* got its name along with other CBC historic tidbits!

Saturday evening we'll meet at the NC Museum of Natural Sciences in conjunction with the Friends of the Museum to hear birder, naturalist and author Scott Weidensaul. Scott has written more than two dozen natural history books including the 2000 Pulitzer Prize finalist *Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds*. His most recent book, *Of a Feather: A Brief History of American Birding*, is an interesting and enjoyable look back at 400 years of

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Big Days, Why?
The Sightings and Ramblings of a Young Birder

Mike McCloy

Many birders of a more "traditional" nature tend to scoff upon the idea of a "Big Day", a 24-hour calendar day period in which one sets out to find as many species of birds as possible in a specified area, usually a county or state. Their argument normally centers around the amount of resources consumed on a Big Day, namely gasoline, and many dismiss it as a silly, pointless pursuit...a game.

Yes indeed, it is a game, a way to help rid birding of its widespread, passive stereotype. In my view, the way each birder thinks of the act of birding can fit into one of three categories: an art, a science, a sport, or any combination of the three. Big Days are a way to bring a competitive aspect to the activity of birding, whether the competition is against yourself or against others who have previously set Big Day records. It is a change of pace from the mundane, from the covering of the same small, general area day after day. It is a motivator to get out there, bird and learn. Lastly, a Big Day is not pointless at all. It is a tremendous learning tool, in many ways more so than the more thorough or casual forms of birding.

For me, my first official Big Day was in February of this year. I had done many informal "Big Days" on my own before, but those were mainly a competition against myself to see whether I could find 75...90... 100 species in a given area in a day. Official Big Days comply by American Birding Association (ABA) rules, and are submitted to them once a year for inclusion in their record books. I have now done five official Big Days this year, four in North Carolina and one in Washington. I have learned a tremendous amount from each and every one of them.

In order to successfully plan a Big Day route, one must have in-depth knowledge of exactly where to find each expected species. Ok, no big deal right? Wrong. Think about it for a minute. When running a Big Day, the phrase "plenty of time" is alien. This means that you are forced to find as many species as possible in as few and quick of stops as possible. Okay, so just hit the major hotspots along your planned route and you'll get a good enough tally. Wrong again. In a Big Day, no tally is "good enough". Even if it is close to dusk and you have already broken the previous monthly/state record, you don't stop. You try for owls and rails after dusk, giving your absolute 100% until you just can't bird any more. Caffeine is essential. And if you only bird at hotspots along the Big Day route, a surprising number of common birds will be missed, even if most of the more uncommon species are found. Thus, it is essential to integrate short stops for specific target birds in with several hotspots during the day. This is where an inherent knowledge of bird distribution and abundance comes in. You have to have locations planned where you can find Blue Jay, Tree Swallow, White-breasted Nuthatch, and other common species, as well as back-up locations for each one.

House Sparrows can be surprisingly tricky to find along some Big Day routes in NC. Many times, the common birds disappear when you really need to find them on a Big Day. This is why you need backup, even multiple backup, locations for as many of these as possible. From doing four Big Days in NC this year, I have learned a surprising amount about reliable locations for common and uncommon species that I never thought about before. Sometimes you need to make spur-of-the-moment stops to pick up species that you missed elsewhere, and this is where deep knowledge of habitat preferences comes in. This patch of habitat is too small, too wet, too dry, too young, etc. for species "X", let's not waste time here and instead travel on down the road to find some better looking habitat. Ali Iyoob and I did a Big Day last year, ending with 130 species, which was a new NC November record. Some of our big misses that day were American Goldfinch, House Sparrow, Brown Thrasher, Hermit Thrush, and Sora, all common birds in November in the right habitat in eastern NC.

Big Days also require a keen ear, since most species of land birds are checked off for the day's tally by sound alone- whether it be a Kentucky Warbler's song, a Downy Woodpecker's whinny, the crisp call note of a Swamp Sparrow, or the flight call of a Bobolink. To

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end with a respectable total for the day, it is absolutely essential to know at least all the usual vocalizations of the expected land birds on your route. This serves as a motivating tool to study up on vocalizations before hand, especially if you are not one to bird by ear often. Also, upon hearing an unknown vocalization on a Big Day, the potential addition of a species to the day's tally drives you to track down the bird as quickly as possible. For me, this has proven to be the most effective way to learn a new "chip" note. Many birders are resistant to birding by ear, though whether the reason is failing hearing, an overwhelming sensation of "I can never learn all these songs!", or something else entirely. I have birded primarily by ear for years, and can attest to its effectiveness. Upon looking back on past daily checklists, especially from forested settings, I would estimate that in certain circumstances, 75% or more of these species were ID'd by ear first, many of which I never ended up actually laying eyes upon. Thus, you can see why birding by ear is essential to the success of a Big Day.

Conducting a Big Day also causes you to be hypervigilant. In normal circumstances, like casually birding with a friend or while on a field trip, birders tend to get lost in conversation instead of actually birding. I have observed this phenomenon especially while driving between birding spots. Yes, I am guilty of this myself (many times over) and have probably missed many noteworthy birds this way. On a Big Day though, there is no room for error here...every bird counts. Thus, you are just as alert while driving, looking for distant raptors soaring or for a different looking sparrow flushing out of that roadside ditch, as you are while actually birding. A good example is when Ali and I did our recent Big Day. Super-alert while driving, always scanning the marsh edges, the distant horizons, and the telephone wires, we spotted a Glossy Ibis in the marsh by the north end of the Oregon Inlet Bridge along Route 12. Glossy Ibises are very hard to find on the Outer Banks that late in the season, and this was an exceptional bonus bird for us on the Big Day. If we weren't constantly looking, then we most likely would have missed the bird entirely.

A unique aspect of a Big Day is that every bird is equally important. Okay, you say, all birds are always important, not just on a Big Day. Entirely correct, but these common birds like chickadees, titmice, cardinals, grackles, and doves, tend to get passed over on a daily basis by most active birders. A North Carolina birder will pay much more attention to a Masked Duck than to a Mallard, at least in NC. The reason is clear- there is only one state record for Masked Duck, but Mallards can be seen virtually anywhere. On a Big Day though, a Masked Duck and a Mallard are treated as equals -- each will add one species to your list for the day.

While talking to non-birders, mentioning that you have just done, or are about to do, a Big Day is a great way to spark interest. Many are turned off from the idea of birding if they think it is purely a passive hobby for the rich elderly (which is still the widespread stereotype, although the book and movie *The Big Year* helped). If introduced to the competitive aspect however, many view it as a sport, a break from the mundane, and even view it as "cool". I have observed this personally on several occasions. On one occasion in particular, I stopped at a gas station in Raleigh, NC about 9 p.m. the day before a Big Day to buy two five-hour energy shots to keep me going the next day. The cashier was in his late twenties, and made a remark along the lines of "a lot of partying tonight"? I said no, early morning tomorrow...getting up at 2 a.m. to drive halfway across the state in order to see as many species of birds as possible. His response was "Dude, that's totally cool". I ended up telling him about it for the next five minutes or so, and he was captivated. Similar responses have been evoked from fellow students at Western Carolina University when I have mentioned my Big Days.

Many Big Day birders have pledged charitable donations for every species recorded on a Big Day, or have gotten sponsors to do so. If you have the means, this is a great way of helping to publicize exactly what it is that you are doing and also serves as a way to offset the impact you have on resources while doing it.

Big Days equal extreme birding. They are not for the faint of heart. In summary, Big Days are not just a silly, wasteful game. They are a way to further your avian knowledge, break away from the usual birding stereotypes, perhaps help spark interest in non-birders, and most of all, see a lot of birds and have fun! So get out there and bird, bird, bird, and go ahead, try a Big Day! You won't regret it.

Which Booby Was That?

Michael Tove

Years ago, I led a group of intrepid birders to Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania. We flew to Washington, DC, rented a car and drove the rest of the way. It was the least expensive itinerary at the time. We arrived full of anticipation for a big Broad-winged Hawk migration. After all, our trip *was* timed to coincide with the peak. As luck would have it, we timed it perfectly – well almost. The largest single day flight in the sanctuary's history – over 21,000 Broad-wings – had occurred the day before. For those few birders fortunate enough to have never experienced the misfortune of being "a day late and a dollar short," let me simply say it's really depressing; enough so that an otherwise respectable birding day can be wholly uninspiring – especially while enduring endless reminders of "You should have been here yesterday."

It was under this shroud that I learned of a possible savior. No, nothing religious; a Spotted Redshank had been found at Brigantine, National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey, about three hours distant. I polled the group and it was unanimously agreed to cut our Hawk Mountain trip short and make for the New Jersey shore.

At roughly 5 a.m. we hit the road. The object was to reach Brigantine early enough to have a full day before driving back to DC to catch our evening flight home. About 6:30, we reached the outskirts of Philadelphia and stopped at a roadside McDonald's for breakfast and a leg stretch.

I've always thought of McDonald's as a place where one reliably knew what to expect. After all, the corporate office demands precise uniformity right down to the length the grass is cut. Consistency, above all else, is demanded. I suppose in some ways, this place was compliant: it had the usual food and our choice of seating for a group of more than four was limited to fixed position booths with pre-formed, undersized, hard plastic swivel chairs located beside the artificial foliage planter box next to the exit. But, that's where the conformity ended. The only employee, wearing a wooden crucifix large enough to be functional, took our orders with "Welcome to McDonald's brother" and "Thank you friend." The interior was horribly unkempt – perhaps tailored for the regular patrons of derelicts and drunks trying, with marginal success, to sober up on McDonald's coffee.

But beyond noticing – and chuekling at the eclectic nature of the place, our conversation quickly shifted to what all good birders invariably talk about: previous birding trips. I've always been amused, and I'm as guilty as anyone, that no matter how good a trip one is on, it's always a previous trip that is talked about. Only *after* the present trip is over does it achieve conversational importance.

Our most senior member was a grandmotherly woman in her mid-70's. Visually, she seemed the last person anyone would suspect of being an avid birder and adventurer. But there she was, telling us of her recent trip to the Dry Tortugas, rattling off a long list of all sorts of mouth-watering migrants at finger's length distance. I inquired "Did you see the boobies?" Before she could answer, a drunken woman wearing a metallic green spandex dress with an oversized zipper that parted the entire front, stumbled past, heading for the exit. Upon my utterance, she abruptly stopped, dug her elbows into the planter box and glared. Everyone froze. The silence was broken with her first utterance. In a gravelly voice from far too many cigarettes, she croaked "I love it!" We cracked up. She began telling us her life story, mostly recounting her long string of husbands. Somewhere around number six, a man came in and dragged her out. Number seven (or higher) perhaps?

With the breakfast adventure concluded, we continued to Brigantine to search for the bird. It had been frequenting a flat occupied by a flock of Greater Yellowlegs. A substantial crowd with scopes lined the edge of the causeway, so this seemed a promising omen. But alas, nobody had seen the bird since early that morning. After considerable scanning on our own, I became satisfied that no Spotted Redshank was present.

The suggestion was made that sometimes the bird foraged in front of a tower located about a half-mile

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Come to Florida…
CBC Bonus Trip April 21-29, 2012

South Florida is the only truly tropical region in the entire mainland United States. It has mangroves, manatees, bromeliads, and crocodiles. But most of all it has birds, many of them found nowhere else in the country.

North of Fort Lauderdale we'll see breeding Least Bittern, Limpkin, Purple Gallinule and more at Wakodahatchee Wetlands. Near Miami we'll look for Red-whiskered Bulbul, Monk Parakeet, and Spot-breasted Oriole. The agricultural lands and swamps around Lake Okeechobee are great for Sandhill Crane, Crested Caracara, Short-tailed Hawk, and Florida Scrub-Jay. South of Naples, we'll look for Burrowing Owl, Mangrove Cuckoo, Reddish Egret and Snowy Plover on the Gulf Coast. The Everglades are famous for the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow, Roseate Spoonbill, Snail Kite, Gray Kingbird, and White-crowned Pigeon. We may even see Greater Flamingo and Shiny Cowbird. Our last major destination is the Florida Keys to look for Magnificent Frigatebird, Black-whiskered Vireo and Antillean Nighthawk. We'll also search for Common Ground-Dove, Painted Bunting, and a host of migrant warblers. Our day on Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas will be nothing short of spectacular, from the Sooty Tern and Brown Noddy breeding colony, to the host of migrant warblers, buntings, and other songbirds. And a West Indian vagrant, perhaps a Key West Quail-Dove or La Sagra's Flycatcher, may be around the next bend in the trail.

Logistics:
This bonus trip begins and ends in Fort Lauderdale.

Attendance is limited to **10** people plus the leaders.

Trip price of **$850.00** includes lodging, group vehicles (2), entrance fees, and guide service. A single supplement in the amount of $250 is required of those who do not wish, or are unable to, share a room. Participants are responsible for the cost of their transport to and from Florida and all meals, as well as items of a personal nature.

Note that visiting the Dry Tortugas requires a 70-mile boat ride in each direction. Inclement weather or adverse sea conditions could preclude visiting the Tortugas, although weather is generally favorable during late April.

An initial deposit of **$300.00** is due with your registration form to ensure a seat on this trip, and final payment is due by **March 31, 2012.** Participants may receive a full refund for cancellation until March 31, 2012. After this date refunds can only be made if someone can fill your seat.

Trip leaders are Bruce Smithson and Stacy Smaltz.

Interested?
Act fast as this opportunity will surely sell out quickly! In for more information, or to reserve your spot, contact Bruce Smithson at (910) 538-1441 (cell) or brucesmithson@netscape.net.

Raleigh Meeting

(*continued from page 1*)
ornithological history from native Americans to our present high-tech world. Scott is an excellent speaker and brings interesting perspectives to his topic, so you won't want to miss this opportunity to hear him. For more information, check out Scott's Website: http://www.scottweidensaul.com

We will have some of the early CBC documents on display at the Museum Saturday night including early bird records. We also invite you to participate by bringing to the meeting any pre-2000 photos you may have of field trips or meetings. If you are unable to attend, but have photos you are willing to share, please scan and send to Gail Lankford at: whocooksforyou@skyrunner.net

Please mark your calendars now for this historic weekend, a chance to bird, to renew friendships and to reflect on the last 75 years of the Carolina Bird Club. We're looking forward to seeing you in Raleigh.

AMAZING, AWESOME, ALASKA!

Bonus Trip June 2012

Fabulous scenery, excellent mammal viewing, and birds found nowhere else on the continent. Alaska is a must for every North American birder!

Immense expanses consisting of range upon range of snowy mountains, glaciers beyond count, islands teeming with seabirds, coastal fjords edged with fog-drenched forest, vast boreal taiga, and untold miles of rolling tundra—Alaska's magnificence is beyond compare.

This trip offers a complete cross section of birds and geography. It focuses upon three very different areas: the parks, rugged hills, and seacoast of Anchorage; breathtaking Kenai Fjords National Park and the adjacent Kenai Peninsula; and the sprawling wilderness in the shadow of majestic Denali (Mount McKinley), North America's highest peak.

We'll begin in Anchorage, then drive south, birding en route to Seward where we will spend a day on a tour boat cruising Resurrection Bay and, if seas permit, around the Chiswell Islands where thousands of seabirds breed.

Then back to Anchorage where we'll take the Glenn Highway east to the Richardson Highway. North from here to the Denali Highway. Of course we'll be stopping frequently to enjoy the birds and wildlife along the way.

We will spend two whole days exploring the 135-mile long Denali Highway. Its stunning scenery and alpine tundra make it a Disneyland for birders.

Next, we proceed to Denali National Park where we'll enjoy a guided tour through the park, spectacular scenery, and the best wildlife viewing in Alaska.

The trip will be scheduled for June 2012 with costs and specific dates to be posted soon on the Carolina Bird Club web site.

Contact BruceSmithson@netscape.net with questions.

Targets Include:

Trumpeter Swan
Barrow's Goldeneye
Harlequin Duck
Willow Ptarmigan
Rock Ptarmigan
Pacific Loon
Red-necked Grebe
Pelagic Cormorant
Red-faced Cormorant
Gyrfalcon
Northern Hawk-Owl
Great Grey Owl
American Golden-Plover
Hudsonian Godwit
Wandering Tattler
Surfbird
Red-necked Phalarope
Parasitic Jaeger
Long-tailed Jaeger
Glaucous-winged Gull
Arctic Tern
Common Murre
Thick-billed Murre
Marbled Murrelet
Kittlitz's Murrelet
Rhinoceros Auklet
Pigeon Guillemot
Horned Puffin
Tufted Puffin
Three-toed Woodpecker
Olive-sided Flycatcher
Bohemian Waxwing
Boreal Chickadee
Arctic Warbler
Northern Wheatear
Common Redpoll
Northwestern Crow
Steller's Jay
Black-billed Magpie
Golden-crowned Sparrow
Lapland Longspur
Smith's Longspur
Pine Grosbeak
White-winged Crossbill

The most recent editions of the Newsletter and The Chat are online on the CBC website. All CBC members will use the same username and password to access these publications. The username is "**member**" and the password is "**birdfun**". This is a membership benefit, please don't share the password with non-members! The password will be changed from time to time, but can always be found in the most recent print edition of the Newsletter.

Go to http://www.carolinabirdclub.org/newsletter to access the Newsletter, and http://www.carolinabirdclub.org/chat to access The Chat.

Booby

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away. With a dirt/gravel, one-lane, one-way levee road several miles long, there would be no turning back. Nonetheless, we packed up and left. Before long we were climbing the steep staircase to the top of the tower where we began to scan. Hardly a minute later, a car barreling up the dike at great speed approached. Reaching the tower, it skidded sideways to a stop with the driver shouting out the window: "It's back there!" The tower evacuated faster than if someone yelled "Fire!" We, along with a half dozen other vehicles, raced back in what can only be described as a scene out of a "Keystone Cops" silent film. Upon arrival, a great cloud of dust enveloped the group, momentarily blocking out the sun. Someone said "Don't panic" which of course causes the exact opposite reaction. They continued, "It's here but we don't know where it is." As the dust cleared and we could again see, everyone began a careful, systematic search. In spite of hopeful assurances that no bird had flown away, we found nothing.

An hour passed, maybe more, when we gradually became aware of a lone shorebird sleeping behind a tuft of grass. The more we looked, the more it didn't seem quite right for a Greater Yellowlegs. Finally the bird woke and began foraging. Of course, it was the Spotted Redshank. Everyone got their fill of this wonderful, rare lifer. After an enjoyable but otherwise unremarkable day at Brigantine, we departed. Other than the satisfaction of the lifer – the day's adventures were not discussed until long after. Only when it became the trip I was on previously, while participating on another trip somewhere else, was it the adventure to retell. And perhaps fittingly, the most prominently recounted part of the trip was something we never actually saw: Boobies.

Great Snipes!

What would you guess the fastest migrating bird to be? Surely something snazzy and streamlined… maybe a tern or a falcon? According to a recent study published in the Royal Society journal *Biology Letters*, the Great Snipe was found to fly non-stop over 4,200 miles at an average speed of 60 miles per hour. The authors report knowing of no other bird that covers so much ground at such a high average speed.

HQ Secretary, NC & SC Bird Records Committee Changes

As we welcome 2012 we have some new faces in roles that support the Club and the North and South Carolina Bird Records Committees.

After many years of dedicated service as the Headquarters Secretary, Dana Harris of Bloomingdale, Illinois hands over the reins to Katherine Higgins of Wilmington, NC. Dana was instrumental in moving the "back office operations" of the Club into the electronic age, moving us from a pen and paper organization to one that allows for much more efficient administration. The progress that Dana made will continue as Katherine works to make reporting, administration, and signing up for seasonal meetings even more efficient. We welcome Katherine, who vacated her position as Western North Carolina Member-At-Large in order to assume this most important role.

After more than twenty years in the role of North Carolina Bird Records Committee (NCBRC) chairman, Harry LeGrand passed the baton to Michael Tove of Cary, NC in November. The NCBRC is charged with maintaining the official list of the birds of North Carolina and reviews sightings of rare or out of range birds reported from the state. LeGrand remains on the committee and will continue to apply his exceptional knowledge of birds and birding in North Carolina. Welcome Michael, and Harry, thank you for your years of dedication!

In South Carolina, Irvin Pitts takes the reins of chair of that state's Bird Records Committee from Donna Slyce. Welcome Irvin!

The opinions expressed in the CBC Newsletter are not necessarily those of the Carolina Bird Club or its members, but are those of the authors who have contributed material. All CBC members are encouraged to submit content for publication. Submitted articles may be edited for style, content, or length prior to publication. Submissions may be made in electronic format to newsletter@carolinabirdclub.org, or by mail to the address on the back cover.

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Raleigh, NC May 4-6, 2012
Greenville, SC September 2012

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